

MISSOULA
COUNTY



MISSOULA CITY-COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH DIVISION
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EXHIBIT 2
DATE 2/18/2011
HB 559

February 18, 2011

Dear Chairman Howard and House Human Services Committee,

The Missoula City-County Health Department opposes HB 559 as written because the guest ranch licensing requirements will still be unclear and difficult to apply. Furthermore, it places responsibility on local health departments, without giving us the tools to ensure public health standards will be met.

We support the Montana Environmental Health Association's (MEHA) amendments. Their version makes the licensing requirements less complicated and makes it clear that small guest ranches are exempt from public health regulation.

It's important that the licensing exemption only apply to smaller guest ranches. Larger facilities have more potential to impact public health, and should be held to the same standards as other public accommodations and food services.

- Larger facilities go beyond "family style" cooking. There are real public health concerns with how food is cooked, cooled, served, and stored for large groups.
- Because of the number of visitors, larger facilities are more at risk for public health concerns like bed bugs, lice and scabies.
- Drinking water and sewage issues become more of a concern with larger groups of transient guests. More people can be adversely affected when there are problems.

Public Health laws, rules and policies protect against the spread of disease and environmental hazards. They have made a difference in all of our lives. The proposed amendments to HB 559 limit public health regulation of smaller guest ranches, but by clarifying licensing requirements, they will help health departments be more consistent and fair. In addition, they will compel us to focus on those establishments that have higher potential public health impacts.

We urge you to support the MEHA amendments to HB 559.

Sincerely,

Ellen Leahy, Health Officer
Missoula City-County Health Department

February 18, 2011

Dear Chairman Howard and House Human Services Committee,

The Montana Environmental Health Association opposes HB 559 as written:

- It does not clarify which guest ranches will need to license. It still requires small guest ranches track the average number of guests, and determine licensing requirements on a year to year basis. The requirement for licensing will always be one year behind.
- It creates responsibility on the part of the state and local health departments without providing authority or funding. It would be better to be clear that small guest ranches are not regulated.

We support changes to the law, however, and submit the attached amendments for the committee's consideration. The new language (shown in orange) makes the law easier and fairer to apply, because it bases the requirement to license on guest capacity instead of an average guest count. This change will require less record keeping and reporting by the small guest ranches and can be implemented in a consistent fashion.

We believe that the licensing exemption should only apply to smaller guest ranches. Larger facilities have more potential of impacting public health, and should receive the same oversight, and be subject to the same regulations as other public accommodations and food services.

- Larger facilities go beyond "family style" cooking. There are real public health concerns with how food is cooked, cooled, served, and stored for large groups.
- Because of the number of visitors, larger facilities are more at risk for public health concerns like bed bugs, lice and scabies.
- Drinking water and sewage issues become more of a concern with larger groups of transient guests. More people can be adversely affected when there are problems.

The focus of public health is to prevent rather than treat disease. Our job is to prevent epidemics and the spread of disease and to protect against environmental hazards. Public Health is an ever-present part of our daily lives. The air we breathe, the foods we eat, the water we drink are all safer as a result of public health policies and programs, including those that regulate public accommodations.

Tourists who visit Montana's guest ranches have a right to expect safe water, safe food, safe accommodations and safe sewage disposal. Our job, as state and local sanitarians, is to provide that oversight. It would be irresponsible of us to do otherwise.

We urge you to support the amendments to HB 559.

Sincerely,

Christine Hughes, President
Montana Environmental Health Association